

Report – Village to Village Conference, October 5 to 7, 2015

“The Village Movement: Aging’s New Frontier” Delegates from KVVP – Christine and Chuck Daugherty

The conference for Chuck and I was incredible. It was quite a learning experience. The key note speaker on Monday was outstanding and I down-loaded her talk and sent it out to all of you. We were delighted to represent KVVP.

A few facts on the attendees – 1/3 of them were from California. Most of the attendees were white women – which constitute the majority of all of Villages. Many of them (us) were the veterans of social change and causes when we were younger. There was a scattering of African-Americans and a few Asians. Most villages are urban.

“Thanks to modern medicine and healthy life-styles, we are living longer.” Some speakers called it the “silver tsunami”. “When something strengthens our stereotypes of positive aging – people live longer.” The emphasis was on the “next stage, not the end stage”. One interesting analogy was that in the 1880s, there was no concept of childhood and now it is redefined. “As childhood got re-defined, how might we change the emergent life stories of growing old?”

Jack Young from SAIL in Shepardsstown was there and we sat together often. (I learned that SAIL charges \$250 for an individual and \$500 for a household) There was some discussion on funding sources including Chambers of Commerce, insurance companies, and partnerships with hospitals and AARP, etc. The new requirement by Medicare re: re-admission of people gives hospitals an incentive to partner with Villages who can help seniors who have been hospitalized recover at home. Local corporations can potentially provide volunteers in some cases for all-volunteer villages as well as social work interns at local universities. Banks have been challenged to provide volunteers to Villages because of the Community Reinvestment Act.

Many villages have more than one tier of membership. SAIL has paying members and volunteers who don’t pay anything. In the evaluation that we participated in (U C Berkeley) the average village had 135 people and the average age was 76. ¾ of the members are female. 93% were white and 47% were married. 25% of them had mobility issues, 89% had falls in the last year, and 48% live alone. 8% are socially isolated. 64% of the Villages provided social events, 36% information and referral, and 32% transportation. Membership dues make up 50% of funding and external funding another 50%. 75% said that their Village would be around in 10 years.

46% said that their quality of life had improved as a result of Villages, 92% had a sense of belonging, and 54% feel more connected. 48% said that they were more able to age in place, and only 29% said that taking care of their home was easier.

A valuable break-out session was on the Boost your Brain program. There was a free DVD for each Village and Chuck is interested in leading one for our Village. It reduces the risk of dementia and includes a series of strategies to enhance everyday memory. It is 8 weekly sessions – 60 to 90 minutes each or could do a weekend intensive.

Edger Cahn presented a key-note session on Time Banking. “Villages are re-building the ‘operating system – which used to rely on the unpaid labor of women, children, and slaves. We are building a social Prius – running on reliance on the universal capacity to engage with human beings. “Money is a mono-crop – a fragile system. A poly-culture crop replaces some of the money with time and energy”. Villages are a virtual community – all about social justice.

- No more throw-away people
- No more free rides off the backs of women and minorities.
- Stop one-way transactions. Instead reciprocity – pay it ahead.
- Stop strip-mining communities and families – create a new kind of extended family. “Dream circles” of making a difference
- New ways to value people.
- An “insurance policy based, not on \$\$, but on hours in the bank.
- Time banking enables people to cross boundaries – the new civil rights movement.

We also attended sessions on strategic partnerships, civic investment in our Village, and heard from the White House Conference on Aging. Information included recommendations on long-term care supports, elder justice abuse, and “changing the perception of aging – creating an “age-friendly city”. (Could Charleston be one of these?)

Future challenges – How do we scale up this movement? How do we reach those that are left out? We are 90% white – how do we fix this? We are in the middle of the “silver tsunami” AND a growing inequality of incomes. Because of the means-tested programs for low-income people, the middle –class is ineligible for help. But as recent data on the economy in the US has demonstrated, the middle –class is falling behind economically. Finally, we need to promote transparency in the marketing and development of drugs. Law-makers have tried but Big Pharma keeps bottling reforms up bills for reform in committee.

We need to make a business case for Villages (in WV). There was a couple of case studies given and the information is on the VtV web site. Many villages pointed out that we can’t be sustaining on membership fees alone.. In order to apply for grants in assistance, we need better numbers. The presenter suggested “Track everything – the # of people in outreach programs, compile quotes from members and survey them. Create different membership categories (2 or 3) to increase and recruit new members. Look at the impact of them on your growth statistics.”

The next meeting will be in Columbus, Ohio on October 17-19, 2016. If you are interested in seeing some of the power point presentations for this year, go to the VtV website and look under national meetings. While this last annual conference was extra-ordinarily expensive, I believe that we brought back much useful information. I suggest that for the next meeting in Columbus, we encourage a number of people to attend – perhaps paying for registration, but encouraging them to drive and find low-cost accommodation on their own. These annual meetings are full of information, but also in attending them, we participate in the growth of new answers for seniors as they age and the potential for changing the national conversation on the value of seniors and their contribution to society.